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CHAPTER IX

INDUSTRIES. THE VILLAGE MARKET

ONE of the commonest industries in Egypt is pottery-making, 323
and the methods employed are usually very simple. There are, roughly speaking, two kinds of pottery—hand-made and wheel-turned. When no wheel is employed the potters may be men or women, but the wheel is used only by men. I shall deal with this industry at some length, for, despite their importance for archæology, the methods employed by potters in modern Egypt have hitherto received little attention from archæologists. Several of these, however, have recently told me that my researches in this subject will form a valuable addition to the study of ceramic art, and will throw light on the different methods of pottery-making employed in much earlier times, not only in Egypt itself, but in other parts of the Mediterranean area also.

The processes in the manufacture of pots vary in different parts of Egypt, and I will endeavour to give as detailed a description as possible of those which I have studied in Fayūm, Minia, Asyūṭ, and Ḳena Provinces.

In one village in Asyūṭ Province there is a large pottery-making establishment in which both men and women are employed, and where hand-made as well as wheel-turned pots are manufactured. The potters carry on their art in charming surroundings, the scene of their labours being a beautiful palm-grove, the trees of which afford them a welcome shade.

The clay used for the pots is obtained in the neighbourhood, and 317
is prepared for use by a woman. It is put in a hollow in the 323
ground, and a certain amount of finely chopped chaff is mixed with 462
it, as well as sufficient water to make it of the proper consistency. One of the women then kneads this preparation with her feet until it is thoroughly mixed.

In this particular locality only women make the hand-made pots, 323
and the process is as follows. When the clay is ready for use one 462
of the potters forms portions of it into flat, round cakes, from two

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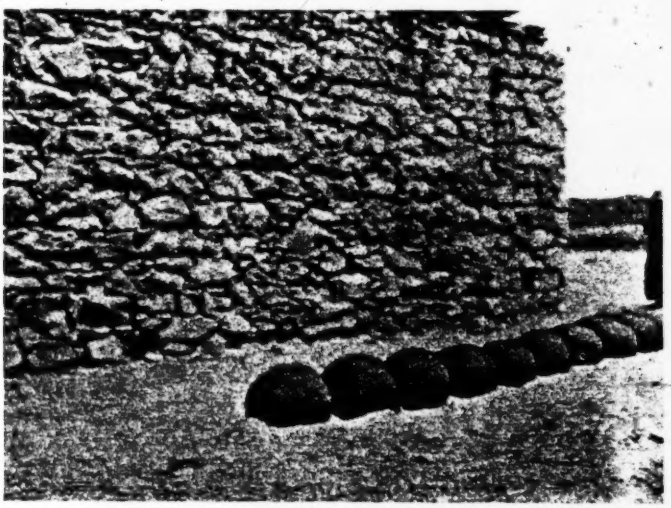
should be noted that in this case the pot was not taken out of the hollow in the ground until it was ready for sun-baking. 323 563

Similar jars are made by another family of potters in this Arab village, where the women assist their menfolk by preparing the clay for use. The method employed in the manufacture of these jars is the same as that just described.

Much farther south I saw a somewhat different method. The pots, which are of various shapes and sizes, are not only all entirely 323 184



[415]

FIG. 71. WATER-JARS SUN-BAKING

wheel-turned, but the material of which they are made differs from that used farther north; also, the vessels are covered with a slip and painted with simple designs. [531]

The pots are made of *ḥamr* (a reddish clay), which is brought in large lumps from the adjacent desert. These are broken up, soaked in water, and then kneaded into a clay of the right consistency. No chopped straw is mixed with it. After the pots have been turned on the wheel (Fig. 72) they are placed on hard clay disks to sun-bake for half a day, and during this period they are tilted slightly from time to time, so that the air may circulate underneath. This is done so as to ensure an even evaporation of the superfluous moisture from all parts of 323 [317]

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On another pottery-making site in Fayūm Province which I visited large *ziyār* and pans, as well as *ḳulal* (see p. 151) and other small vessels, are made. Both hand- and wheel-made methods are employed here. The clay used in the manufacture of the larger vessels is obtained from Kīmān Fāris. This clay is soaked in water till it is of the right consistency, then *mūṣ* is mixed with it and well kneaded. The words *mūṣ* and *tibn* both mean finely chopped straw, but the former is so finely chopped that it is more like a powder. This mixture is left to soak for one day in a large hollow in the ground. It is then removed and left piled up in a heap for four days before it is ready for use. Each potter takes a large quantity of this prepared clay and places it conveniently near the spot where he is working, keeping it covered with sacking to prevent further evaporation.

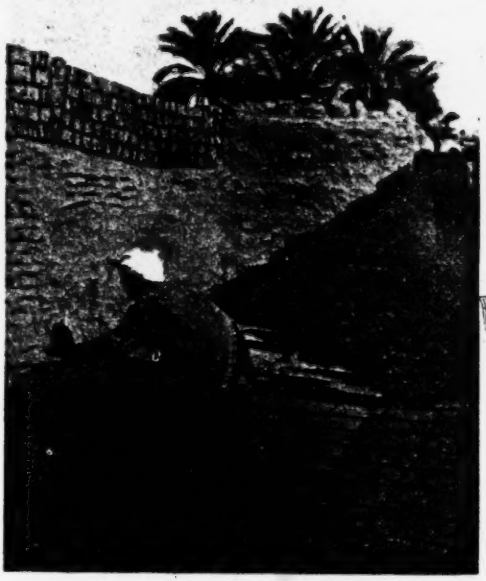

FIG. 76. MAN MAKING TILES

The *ziyār* and large pans are made on the wheel, the former in the manner described earlier in this chapter; they are, however, decorated with simple designs on the upper half of the vessel. This decoration is done with the aid of an implement called a *garūt* (see p. 152, Fig. 80), which consists of a thin, flat piece of iron bent at a right angle at the top.

For making the pans the process is as follows. The revolving table is covered with a thin layer of clay, and on this a thick pillar

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The custom of binding the cord just below the rims of the larger pans may have been also practised in former times when making the upper part of a *zīr*. As I stated earlier in the chapter, the potter usually makes incised marks with his thumbnail just below the rim of a *zīr*, the marks roughly resembling those made by the impress of the cord. This impress may have suggested a pattern, which the conservative mind of the potter demanded should always appear on that portion of the pot, even when the cord was no longer wound round it. Thus the marks made round the base of the rim by the thumbnail may be an imitation of somewhat similar markings left by a cord bound round this part of the *zīr* in earlier times.

FIG. 78. PANS BOUND WITH CORDS DRYING IN THE SUN

Smaller vessels, such as *ḳulal* (singular *ḳulleh*) (Fig. 79), are also made at this factory, and the clay used is obtained from Begīg, or Abgīg, as this village is sometimes called. *Ṭafl* (yellow clay) brought from Kīmān Fāris is mixed with the ordinary clay, the proper proportions being two-thirds ordinary clay to one-third *ṭafl*. These two materials are laid in water to soak till they are quite soft. They are then removed to a deep cavity dug in the ground, where a man kneads them with his feet. The mixture is taken out and piled in a heap, so that the superfluous moisture may evaporate.

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323 415 317 When it is ready for use each potter takes a quantity from this store, and places it in his hut, covering it, as usual, with sacking. A large lump of clay, worked up into a thick bolster shape, is taken and placed on the round table above the wheel. From this quantity of clay a number of *ḳulal* are made, each one, on completion, being cut off from the mass of clay by a string attached to a short stick (Fig. 80).

323 413 415 FIG. 70. TWO TYPES OF ḲULLEH OR WATER-BOTTLE

The potter begins by hollowing out the upper portion of the clay with his thumb, turning the wheel with his foot all the time, and slowly drawing up the sides of the vessel, which at the first stage resembles a bowl with thick sides. Then this is gradually shaped into a slender vessel by drawing up the sides, which, of course, become much thinner, until the *ḳulleh* is formed. The grooving

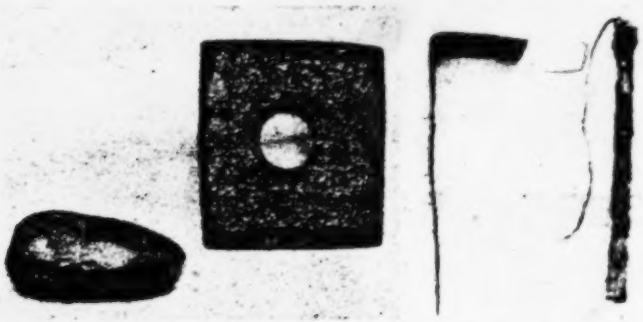

FIG. 80. POLISHING STONE, SĀDIF, GARŪT, AND STRING FOR CUTTING OFF FINISHED POTS

and final shaping is done with the aid of an implement called a *sādif*, a small, thin square of iron perforated in the centre (Fig. 80). The *sādif* is also used for incising the simple designs to be seen on the *ḳulal* made in this locality. The *ḳulleh* is then, as stated above, cut off by a string. The *ḳulal* are sun-baked for 323 one day, then put into the oven, the fire being kept alight for four